

Message Text

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USMISSION ECBRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 789

AFDROUGHT

EO 11652: NA

SUBJECT: DROUGHT SITREP SOUTHEASTERN MAURITANIA

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 762

SUMMARY: ON THE SPOT OBSERVATIONS IN NEMA CONFIRM NECESSITY
OF GIRM REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY FOOD AIRLIFT. ONLY AVAILABLE
ROUTE TO CITY AND REGION PRESENTLY CUT AND WHEN BACK IN SERVICE
WILL CONTINUE TO BE PERIODICALLY (POSSIBLY THRU OCT) UNUSABLE.
LACKING IMMEDIATE DELIVERY EMERGENCY FOOD THERE WILL BEILARGE
SCALE INFANT MORTALITY. GIRM OFFICIALS IN REGION HAVE EFFECTIVELY
DISTRIBUTED AVAILABLE FOOD BUT DURING LAST FOUR MONTHS HAVE
ONLY RECEIVED EQUIVALENT OF ONE MONTH'S SUPPLY. RAINS
IN AREA LATE AND PLANTING HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN WITH NO ACCURATE
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HARVEST PREDICTION POSSIBLE. WHILE ADEQUATE PASTURAGE IS
NOW AVAILABLE IN THE 1ST REGION, AT LEAST AROUND NEMA, THERE

WERE FEW ANIMALS TO UTILIZE IT. SITUATION IN KIFFA AND AOUN
REGIONS BETTER, BUT GRAIN STOCKS THERE RUNNING LOW.

1. EMBOFF TOOK OPPORTUNITY OF CDC DR. GREENE'S SURVEY OF
NEMA, AOUN EL ATROUSS, AND KIFFA TO VISIT THESE REGIONAL
CAPITALS IZJAICFWR ENVIRONS AND PARTICULARLY TO ASSESS FOOD
SITUATION IN NEMA AS RELATED TO THE GIRM REQUEST FOR
EMERGENCY AIRLIFT TO THAT TOWN.

2. GENERAL SITUATION: GIRM REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY AIRLIFT TO
NEMA WAS FIRST OFFICIAL RECOGNITION THAT CITY AND REGION WAS
AMONG THE MOST AFFECTED BY DROUGHT. (MINHEALTH, GIRM OVERALL
COORDINATOR FOR DROUGHT RELIEF, HAD TOLD US IN JULY 1ST
REGION "LEAST AFFECTED.") THE CAPITAL CITY OF NEMA, POPULATION
10,000, AND THE 1ST REGION, POPULATION 200,000, HAVE RECEIVED
ONLY THREE SHIPMENTS OF EMERGENCY FOOD; FEB, MAY AND JULY
1973. ONLY THE MAY SHIPMENT WAS SUBSTANTIAL ALLOWING FOR
A DISTRIBUTION OF 10 KILOS GRAIN PER PERSON. THE JULY SHIPMENT
WAS SO SMALL THAT ONLY 2 KILOS GRAIN PER PERSON COULD BE
DISTRIBUTED. IN SUM 1ST REGION GOT ONLY 13 KILOS PER PERSON
FOR THE LAST FOUR MONTHS AS COMPARED TO GIRM TARGET 13-15
KILOS OF GRAIN PER PERSON PER MONTH. THERE ARE NO RPT NO
STORES OF FOOD REMAINING IN NEMA.

3. THE DIFFICULTIES OF SHIPPING FOOD TO NEMA ARE MANIFEST.
THERE ARE TWO OVERLAND ROUTES. A GOOD DIRT ROAD PARALLELING
THE SENEGAL RIVER TO KAEDI WHICH CONTINUES AS A DIRT TRACK
EAST THROUGH KIFFA AND AOUN TO NEMA. THIS ROUTE IS IMPASSABLE
DUE TO FLOODING ALONG RIVER. THE SECOND, AND MORE DIFFICULT,
RUNS THROUGH ALEG NORTH-EAST TO TIDJIKJA AND THEN SOUTH-EAST
TO AOUN AND NEMA. THIS LATTER SEMI-CIRCULAR ROUTE COVERS
ROUGHLY 1000 KILOMETERS FROM ALEG TO NEMA. HOWEVER,
NEAR ALEG THIS TRACK HAS RECENTLY WASHED AWAY DURING FLASH
FLOOD. BOTH ROADS ARE PRESENTLY OUT, ONE UNTIL END OF RAINY
SEASON AND THE OTHER UNTIL ROAD IS REPAIRED AT ALEG.
(FYI REPAIRS IN PROGRESS.)

4. THE TRACK BETWEEN AOUN AND NEMA, THE MOST DIFFICULT
STRETCH FOR BOTH ROUTES, WINDS THROUGH MOUNTAIN VALLEYS.
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WHEN IT RAINS, WATER COLLECTED IN MOUNTAINS DRAINS INTO THE
DRY RIVER BEDS CRISSCROSSING VALLEY FLOOR MAKING ROAD TRANSPORT
ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. 1ST REGION GOVERNOR, HOWEVER, BELIEVES
ROUTE WILL STAY OPEN DURING RAINY SEASON. IT IS THIS ROUTE
BETWEEN AOUN AND NEMA THAT WILL BE USED FOR TRUCKING SUPPLIES
FLOWN INTO AOUN ABOARD LARGE TRANSPORTS INCAPABLE OF USING
SMALL AIRSTRIP AT NEMA.

AN EXAMPLE OF DIFFICULTIES OF TRAVELING IN THIS AREA
PROVIDED BY VISIT TO A VILLAGE FORTY KILOMETERS FROM NEMA

REACHED ONLY AFTER ONE AND A HALF HOURS DRIVING OVER ROUGH BUT RECENTLY DRIED TRACK. TRUCK DELIVERING FOOD TO SAME VILLAGE A FEW WEEKS AGO WAS CAUGHT IN FLASH FLOODING AND EXHAUSTED ALL FUEL INCLUDING SUBSTANTIAL SUPPLIES FOR RETURN TRIP IN TWO WEEK EFFORT TO REACH VILLAGE.

5. ECONOMY: RAINS IN 1ST REGION STARTED LATE, BUT FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST HAVE BEEN AVERAGE. THUS, PLANTING HAS JUST BEGUN WITH NO CLEAR INDICATION OF SUCCESS. THE PALMERAIES IN THE REGION HAVE PRODUCED NO DATES THIS SEASON BUT RECENT RAINS HAVE PRODUCED GOOD PASTURAGE FOR LIVESTOCK SURVIVING IN NEMA AREA. CONSIDERING NEMA'S REPUTATION AS LIVESTOCK CENTER THE REGION'S LOSSES DUE TO DROUGHT MUST HAVE BEEN HEAVY AS AVAILABLE PASTURAGE AROUND CAPITAL WAS UNDERUTILIZED. NEMA POPULATION INCLUDES LARGE PROPORTION NOMADS WHO, HAVING LOST HERDS, HAVE MOVED INTO OLD SECTION OF TOWN TO LIVE OFF RELATIVES, FRIENDS AND DOLE. IN SHORT, REGION'S ECONOMY OF SUBSISTANCE FARMING, HERDING AND PETTY TRADING HAS COME TO A STANDSTILL.

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AFDROUGHT

6. HEALTH: CDC NUTRITIONAL SURVEY FOLLOWS SEPTEL. BROADLY SPEAKING, NUTRITIONAL CONDITION OF PEOPLE IN CITY OF NEMA SERIOUS WITH THE PROSPECT OF LARGE SCALE INFANT MORTALITY IF FOOD GRAIN AND PARTICULARLY POWDERED MILK ARE NOT RECEIVED IMMEDIATELY. THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE RANGES FROM POOR TO FAIR DEPENDING ON THE NUMBER OF SURVIVING ANIMALS. MEDICAL CADRE IN THE REGION CONSISTS OF ONE MAURITANIAN DOCTOR AND NURSE AND EIGHT PRC MEDICAL PERSONNEL IN NEMA. THERE ARE ALSO SMALL PARA-MEDICAL DISPENSARIES IN SOME TOWNS. MEDICAL SUPPLIES CONSIST MAINLY OF CHINESE DRUGS, WITH THE LIMITED QUANTITIES OF GIRM-ACQUIRED MEDICATIONS BEING DISTRIBUTED TO THE PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF THE CAPITAL. THERE IS SHORTAGE IN ALMOST ALL TYPES MEDICATION WITH NOTABLE LACK ANTI-MALARIAL DRUGS IN FORM CHILDREN CAN TAKE. DIARRHEA
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AND MALARIA ARE ENDEMIC AND THERE HAVE BEEN EPIDEMICS OF MEASLES. IN SUM, DISEASE IS WIDESPREAD, MEDICINES ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY AND MOST OF THE POPULATION IS DISPERSED THROUGH OUT THIS HUGE REGION, IN SMALL CLUSTERS, MAKING TREATMENT VERY DIFFICULT.

7. GENERAL SITUATION IN KIFFA AND AIOUN BETTER THAN NEMA DUE TO MORE REGULAR EMERGENCY FOOD DELIVERIES, BUT BOTH CAPITALS AND REGIONS ARE SUBJECT TO THE SAME TRANSPORT PROBLEMS AS NEMA AND 1ST REGION. THE ECONOMIES OF THESE CITIES CONTINUE TO FUNCTION WITH LIVESTOCK MARKET IN KIFFA MODERATELY ACTIVE. EMERGENCY FOOD SHIPMENTS TO THE TWO REGIONS HAS BEEN CONTINUOUS ALBEIT AT HALF DESIRED LEVEL OF 13-15 KILOS PER PERSON PER MONTH. PROSPECT FOR HARVEST IN THESE TWO REGIONS IS ALSO MORE POSITIVE WITH THE GOVERNOR IN KIFFA STATING FLATLY THAT THERE WOULD DEFINITELY BE A HARVEST (AS OPPOSED TO NONE LAST YEAR) AND THAT IF SEPT. RAINS WERE GOOD THE HARVEST COULD BE EXCELLENT. (FYI THIS IS THE FIRST GOVERNOR TO GIVE ANYTHING BUT DIRE PREDICTIONS). AIRLIFT FOR THESE REGIONS NOT YET NECESSARY BUT FOOD STOCKS ARE LOW AND EMERGENCY MEASURES SUCH AS AIRLIFT MAY BE NECESSARY SHOULD THE RAINS CONTINUE TO DENY ACCESS BY ROAD. SHURTLEFF

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